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Johnson, a graduate of Lincoln Northeast High School and now the office manager of the North Star Inn in Winnipeg, was one of six Nebraska draft dodgers who agreed to talk to a visiting American reporter.

JOHNSON'S PANIC at the border wasn't unusual–all of them were nervous–but his may have been the most extreme.

"What do you tell the officials?" Johnson asked. "That you're going camping--when your stereo speaker is hanging out of the back window?"

On the other hand, there's fear of possible rejection followed by a determined "I can't go back now."

JOHNSON, who had been discharged for medical reasons from Navy ROTC at the University of Nebraska, had done his homework before the interview. A friend in draft dodging had passed around the "Manual for Draft Age Immigrants to Canada," and Johnson knew what red tape to expect. Just three days before his departure, his last document arrived in the mail.

After Johnson was issued two draft orders, he decided to take a job-hunting jaunt to Winnipeg.

Winnipeg is a major Canadian city, but the American economic influence jumps out at you–Safeway Stores, Shakey's Pizza, King's FoodHost. You're not quite sure if you're in Canada or if you brought the United States with you.

THERE ARE banks on every corner, about the way there are service stations everywhere in the United States.

The air is clean here–and cool, especially in the evening. With its high rise skyline, Winnipeg could pass for a twin city to Omaha. There are grain bins here and there around the edges of the city. And nearby St. Vital and St. Boniface could just as easily be Bellvue and Papillion.

Although there is a resemblance to the Nebraska cities, Winnipeg's pace is slower. The Canadians may talk faster, but the atmosphere is relaxing.

JUST AS Interstate 80 cuts through Omaha, two rivers, the Assiniboine and the Red, intersect in the heart of Winnipeg. The Assiniboine Park runs the length of the city.

Johnson is not alone among Nebraska draft dodgers in Winnipeg. There are at least six other native Nebraskans in the city of 530,000 on the Canadian plains. An additional two dozen Nebraskans are scattered from Vancouver on the west to Montreal in the east.

For draft dodgers from Nebraska, Winnipeg, the first large city north of the border, is a logical landing place. It was for John Dietz, the pioneer of the Nebraska colony in Winnipeg. He says he chose it because of its proximity. It's a 12-hour trip by car and a three-hour flight.

DIETZ'S reasons for going to Canado ranged from what he called student apathy toward a University of Nebraska draft dodger to his philosophical view of life. Dietz, 25, a native Omahan who was valedictorian at Omaha Tech High School in 1964, recalled trying to organize support for Stephen Abbot, a NU graduate who refused to submit to induction into the Army.

Abbott was then a graduate student in Atlanta, Ga., and in January 1969 was sentenced to a maximum of three years on a charge of violating the Selective Service Act.

Dietz, a political science major, said only one other person showed up at a meeting to support Abbott.

"I decided if they wouldn't support Abbott, they wouldn't support me. I tried not to fight it."

DIETZ HAD mailed his draft cards to the Douglas County Draft Board Sept. 27, 1968. In his letter to the Selective Service Board he requested withdrawal from the system. He wrote that he realized he faced a prison term for the action, and added:

"But what is that in the face of daily annihilation and mutilation of Vietnamese and Americans in Nam?"

Late in February 1969, a friend said, "You can't go to jail, John. Why don't you go to Canada? There's a place called Peace River, near Northern Alberta."

"I DIDN'T think there was such a place," he said, as he sat in his room of the three-story co-op at 928 Dorchester in Winnipeg, where he has lived since he immigrated. He was sitting amidst his draft file, which was scattered all over the floor.

Reminiscing about the past three years, the short, stocky former Nebraskan said: "Before this time, I hadn't thought of going to Canada. I'd made quick decisions before. If I came to trial in the fall, I might find myself stuck in jail. I expected there'd be nothing to come of my act," he said.

"I made up my mind and told my parents," Dietz said. "They preferred Canada to jail.

"ONE OF the things I had to consider when I crossed the border was leaving friends. I picked out Winnipeg on the map because it looked like the best of the close cities. This was my starting point, and the best for my parents for traveling purposes."

So with bedroll, dufflebag, suitcase and two cardboard boxes full of possessions, this soon-to-be draft dodger kissed his mother goodby in Omaha. It was 4:15 a.m., March 19, 1969, and the vanguard of the Nebraska draft dodgers boarded a Greyhound bus.

Persons entering Canada can either apply for landed immigrant status or say they're visiting and re-cross the border later to become a landed immigrant.

DIETZ decided to visit because he had no job offer or place to live. He thought it would be best to scout around and then apply for landed immigrant status.

Nebraskans Doug and Mary Milander, married only a month when they crossed the border, had requested information about immigrating and filled out "forms and more forms" to present at the border.

Milander, 24, formerly of Norfolk, was a journalism major at the University of Nebraska. He participated in the summer internship program at the Norfolk Daily News and also worked at the Lincoln Star during school. His wife is the former Mary Johnson of Elm Creek, Nebr.

MILANDER said he was more of a follower than a leader in the draft dodger movement. It wasn't until his senior year at the University and on the return bus trip from Omaha to Lincoln after he had passed his induction physical that he decided to leave America forever.

Now, after two years in Canada, Milander says: "Having not really thought much about the United States anymore, it is kind of hard to really explain why I left. It's like trying to describe why you can love one thing, yet hate another."

DURING the trip north, they said, they were careful not to exceed the speed limit, for fear of being caught. And then, they feared, the state patrol would discover their plans.

"They can't ask you directly if you're a dodger. We knew the do's and don'ts, and had our documents. The thought that we could be rejected stuck in the back of my mind. It was touch and go. We were pretty sure we would be accepted, but were still scared.

"When we were accepted and heading for Winnipeg," Milander recalled, "it was sort of anticlimatic. What do we do now? Wow, we were floating on Cloud 9. The load of the world was off our backs.

"WE GOT A big road map of Winnipeg. . .and even got lost. It was a new experience indeed being in Canada. Questions like: 'Can we find a place to live, a job?' kept popping up. It was scarey, yes."

Milander said his reasons for leaving stemmed from a political science class, where a visiting professor brought to his attention the legal aspects of the Vietnam conflict.

BY BEING in Vietnam, Milander said, the United States is in violation of the United Nations Charter, "which makes it illegal for foreign nations to intervene in an internal conflict of a sovereign nation."

". . .to follow my conscience and maintain my identity as a human being, I evaded the Selective Service Act and immigrated to Canada. To remain as an American citizen and follow my beliefs, I would have had to refuse induction and serve time in a federal prison. This was no alternative in comparison to the freedom of living in Canada as a normal human being."

Tomorrow: A look at what they are doing now–their jobs, their homes, their attitudes.